

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

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DODE-00 DOTE-00 EB-07 INR-07 NSAE-00 CIEP-01 FAA-00

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FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4668

AMEMBASSY COLOMBO

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EO 11652: N/A

TAGS: EAIR, TH

SUBJ: AIR SIAM--POSSIBLE COUP VICTIM

REF: A) BANGKOK 28239 B) BANGKOK 27192 C) BANGKOK 21483

1. RUMOR MILL HAS IT THAT THAI INTERNATIONAL AIRWAYS (THAI INTER) LOYALISTS IN NATIONAL REFORM ADMINISTRATIVE COUNCIL (NARC) INTEND TO SETTLE OLD SCORES WITH AIR SIAM SUPPORTERS. THIS ACTION COULD HAVE IMPORTANT BEARING ON HOPES OF MCDONNELL-DOUGLAS (MC-D) TO SELL THIRD DC-10 TO THAI INTER.

2. SITAUTION IS THIS:

A. IN PERIOD JUNE-AUGUST, MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS THAWIT KLINPRATHUM AND UNDER-SECRETARY DR. KAN NAKHAMADI LAUNCHED CAMPAIGN AGAINST OFFICIALS OF THAI INTER, ALLEGING IMPROPRIETIES IN PURCHASE OF TWO DC-10'S AND FAILURE OF THAI INTER OFFICIALS TO ABIDE BY INSTRUCTIONS OF CABINET TO SEVER LONGTIME CORPORATE KINSHIP OF THAI INTER WITH SAS. ALLEGATIONS WITH REGARD TO SAS STEMMED FROM BOARD OF INQUIRY (HEADED BY PRADIT CHANTHARAWATNA, THEN INSPECTOR GENERAL IN THE MINISTRY) AND SPECIFICALLY BRANDED AIR CHIEF MARSHAL KAMON DECHATUNGHA, NOW RANKING NARC LEADER, AS

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CULPABLE. MOREOVER THAWIT AND KAN WERE RASH ENOUGH TO CHALLENGE

PRINCIPLE THAT THAI AIR FORCE OFFICIALS SHOULD BE PERMITTED TO DOUBLE AS MEMBERS OF THAI INTER'S BOARD (CHAIRMANSHIP OF BOARD HAS LONG BEEN PREROGATIVE OF CHIEF OF RTAF). THAI INTER OFFICIALS ARE CONFIDENT THAT AIR SIAM PROMPTED ACTIONS BY THAWIT AND KAN.

B. MINISTER THAWIT, OF COURSE, WAS REMOVED FROM SCENE BY ADVENT OF NARC. THEN, NARC IN SURPRISE MOVE ON OCT. 11 DISMISSED UNDER-SECRETARY KAN AND INSPECTOR-GENERAL PRADIT (AS WELL AS KAN'S WIFE) FROM POSTS IN MINISTRY (REF A). RUMOR HAS IT THAT NEXT NARC TARGETS WILL BE BUDGET BUREAU DIRECTOR BOONTAM THONGKHAIMUM AND HIS DEPUTY MEETA POOMCHUSRI, BOTH OF WHOM ARE MAJOR STOCKHOLDERS IN AIR SIAM. WE WOULD CONSTRUER DISMISSAL OF THESE TWO TO MEAN AIR SIAM'S DAYS ARE IN FACT NUMBERED.

C. WE HAVE IT SECOND-HAND THROUGH AIRLINE SOURCES THAT MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS INTENDS TO FORBID AIR SIAM TO LAUNCH PROPOSED WET-LEASE OPERATION SOON TO EUROPE UNDER AIR CEYLON LOGO. (REF B)

D. SAME AIRLINE SOURCES SAY MINISTRY INTENDS TO AUTHORIZE THAI INTER TO TAKE OVER ALL CATERING AND TECHNICAL SERVICES AT BANGKOK INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT. THIS WOULD BE ADDITIONAL BLOW TO AIR SIAM WHICH EARNS PROFIT ON ITS CATERING SERVICES TO OTHER AIRLINES.

E. AIRBUS INDUSTRIES GROUP, APPARENTLY ENCOURAGED BY ANTI-DC-10 PUBLICITY DURING SUMMER, ARRIVED IN BANGKOK THIS WEEK IN EFFORT TO PERSUADE THAI INTER TO PURCHASE NEW MODEL AIRBUS IN LIEU OF THIRD DC-10.

3. ALTHOUGH MUCH OF FOREGOING IS UNCONFIRMED, DEPT MAY WISH TO MAKE SUBSTANCE AVAILABLE TO MC-D SINCE FIRM IS FACING DECISIONS ON HOW TO ADJUST ITS POSITION AS BETWEEN THAI INTER AND AIR SIAM. THAI INTER, IT WILL BE RECALLED, HAS URGED MC-D TO RECLAIM ITS DC-10 LEASED TO AIR SIAM AND ON WHICH PAYMENTS APPARENTLY CONTINUE TO BE IN ARREARS. MC-D HAS BEEN RELUCTANT TO DO SO, BUT IN VIEW RENEWED AIRBUS THRUST, MC-D MAY WISH TO SEND REP TO BANGKOK TO ASSESS SITUATION AND TO DECIDE WHAT STEPS ARE NEEDED TO MEET COMPETITION. WE WOULD BE INTERESTED IN LEARNING FROM MC-D WHETHER AIR SIAM HAS ASKED MC-D TO REPAINT DC-10 TO SHOW AIR CEYLON AS WELL AS AIR SIAM MARKINGS. BEST SOURCE PROBABLY WOULD LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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